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AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
DISCOVERY

OF A

Mastodon's Remains

IN

NORTHBOROUGH,
WORCESTER COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS.

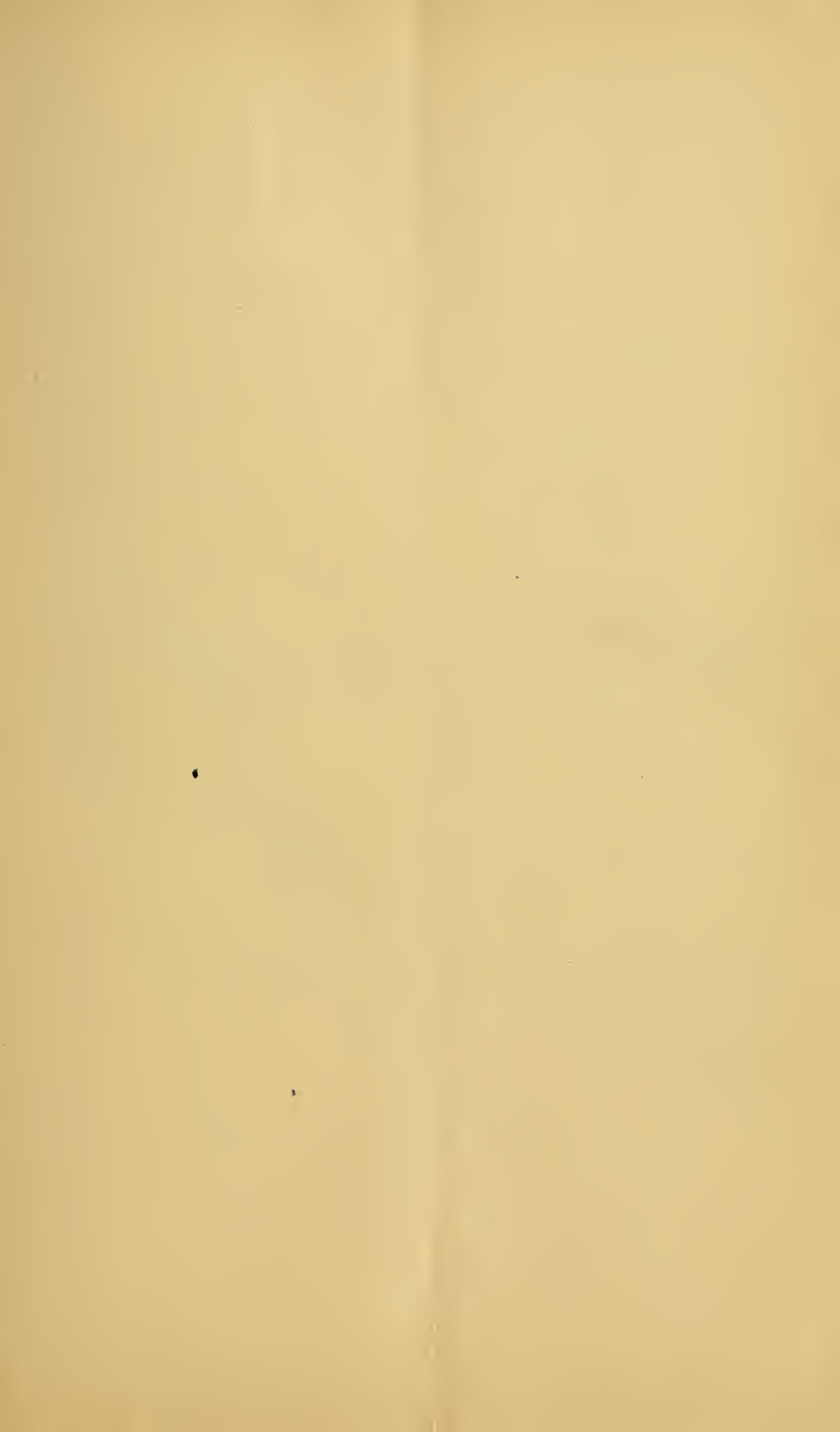
By FRANKLIN P. RICE,

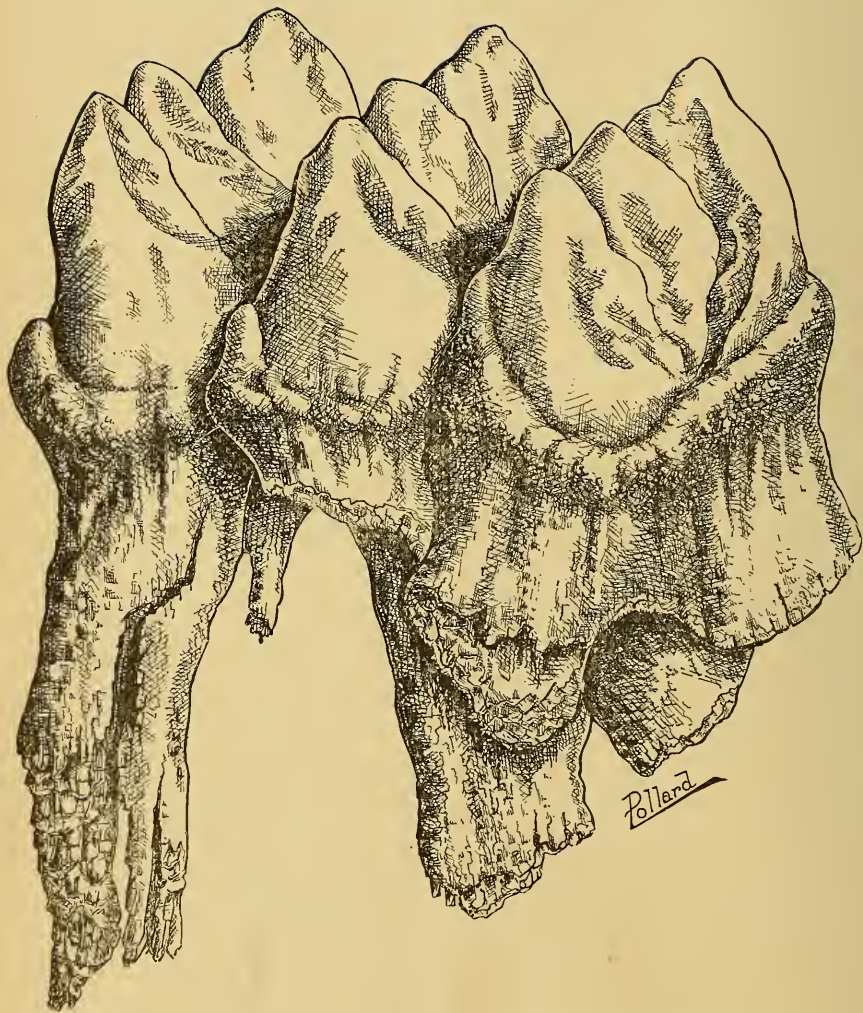
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ON MONDAY, November 17th, 1884, workmen engaged in digging a trench in a meadow on the farm of William U. Maynard, in Northborough, near the Shrewsbury line, came upon some teeth and other remains of a huge animal, which rested upon the bed rock, seven or eight feet below the surface. Mr. Maynard was notified, and further search was made, which resulted in bringing to light more fragments of bone, several teeth, and portions of what appeared to be tusks, the outer layer of ivory being well preserved. Mr. Maynard took these specimens to his house, washed the teeth, and, as he informed the writer, tested the hardness of some of them with a hammer. The same day he placed the relics in the hands of Dr. F. W. Brigham, of Shrewsbury, who brought them to Worcester, and exhibited them to members of both the Natural History Society and the Society of Antiquity, of whom one was Mr. Thomas A. Dickinson, a naturalist of experience, and formerly Superintendent of the Cabinet of the first named society. Dr. Brigham invited these gentlemen to visit Shrewsbury the next day, and promised to go with them to the locality where the remains were found.

On Tuesday, November 18th, Messrs. Ellery B. Crane, Thomas A. Dickinson, Franklin P. Rice, Henry L. Shumway and Henry M. Smith, all of them members of The Worcester Society of Antiquity, went to Shrewsbury, and, under the leadership of Dr. Brigham, visited the spot where the discovery was made. The farm of Mr. Maynard is situated about two miles from the center of the town, on the main road to Northborough. A short distance from his house, and just east of the Northborough line,* is a meadow of several acres' extent; and here, a few rods from the

*The dividing line of the two towns runs very near Mr. Maynard's house.

highway, the remains were found. Mr. Maynard had been excavating in the center of this meadow a large trench, five or more feet broad, and about seven feet deep, intending to fill it with stones, with the twofold purpose of making a drain and providing a road. The matter excavated was of a vegetable or peaty nature, and formed a layer seven or eight feet deep, below which was the solid bed rock. The ditch at this time was open for about fifty feet, and contained a foot of water. The workmen had, apparently, cut across the head of the animal, as bones belonging to other parts of the body were not among those thrown up; and as no pains had been taken to ascertain the relative position of the fragments, it was not possible to decide, without further digging, in which direction the remainder of the body would be found. Only a superficial examination was made, and after hearing the statements of Mr. Maynard and his workmen, the party returned to the city, Dr. Brigham placing two of the teeth and some pieces of bone, ivory, etc. in the hands of Mr. Dickinson to take to Cambridge for identification.

At the adjourned monthly meeting of The Worcester Society of Antiquity, held that evening, the teeth were exhibited to those present, and remarks in relation to them were made by President Crane; Dr. W. H. Raymenton, President of the Worcester Natural History Society; and Messrs. T. A. Dickinson, H. M. Smith, Clark Jillson, A. S. Roe and F. P. Rice. Various theories were propounded, the general sentiment being that the teeth were those of a Mastodon, probably of the *Mastodon giganteus* described by the late Dr. John C. Warren; but this conclusion was the result of a hasty examination of the printed authorities, and not of definite knowledge of the subject.

The announcement of the discovery created quite a sensation in Worcester, and the newspapers set forth the details in glowing accounts which were copied extensively by the press throughout the country. The gentlemen who had visited the place of discovery contemplated their singular experience with considerable satisfaction, and all awaited with impatience the result of the examination at Cambridge. Suspicion existed in the minds of some that the affair might be a hoax, and that, while the teeth were undoubtedly genuine, they might have been placed in the hole for the purpose

of deceiving the unwary. This feeling was not shared by those who had examined the premises and questioned the parties concerned; but allusions to the "Cardiff Giant" served to hold the ardor of the more enthusiastic ones in check. An absurd story was circulated the next day to the effect that, some thirty years before, an elephant belonging to a traveling circus had died in Shrewsbury, and was buried there; and in consequence of this rumor, the Gazette man went over in the rain and interviewed the oldest inhabitants, who convinced him at once that the tale was a fabrication.

On Thursday, the 20th of November, Mr. Dickinson went to Cambridge, and showed the teeth to Prof. Agassiz, who at once pronounced them to be those of a Mastodon, and introduced his visitor to Prof. J. A. Allen, who is regarded as an authority in such matters. The latter carefully examined the specimens, and kindly furnished the following letter:

"MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY,

"Cambridge, Mass., Nov. 20, 1884.

"Dear Sir:—

"The teeth you have shown me, taken from a swamp in Shrewsbury, Mass., are teeth of the Mastodon (*Mastodon americanus*), and belonged to an animal probably about two-thirds grown, as shown by the size and condition of the teeth.

"Although the Mastodon became extinct prior to historic times, its disappearance occurred at a comparatively recent date, geologically speaking. It is deemed probable that it may have lived in North America down to within a few thousand years—possibly within a few centuries—of the discovery of the continent by Europeans.

Yours truly,

"J. A. ALLEN.

"Thomas A. Dickinson, Esq., Worcester, Mass."

This letter, establishing the identity and genuineness of the remains, is of especial importance, as marking the first discovery of the Mastodon in Massachusetts.

Mr. Dickinson also had a pleasant interview with Prof. F. W. Putnam, of the Peabody Museum of American Archæology and Ethnology, who manifested much interest in the teeth, and ex-

pressed the hope that contemporary traces of man would be found if the rest of the animal was disinterred. Mr. Dickinson saw a large number of teeth of the Mastodon at the Museum of Zoölogy, and at the museum of the Boston Society of Natural History, but failed to find any more beautiful or perfect than those in his charge.

At a meeting of the Worcester Natural History Society, on Friday evening, the President, Dr. Raymenton, gave a brief but interesting description of the Mastodon, illustrating its peculiar process of dentition by drawings on the blackboard. Several of the teeth were shown and handed about for examination. Dr. Raymenton had opened negotiations with Mr. Maynard with a view to securing the specimens for the cabinet of his society, where they properly belong ; and had offered one hundred dollars for the privilege of exhuming the rest of the skeleton. The owner refused the offer, as he could not afford to have his meadow torn up for that sum, and fixed his price at five hundred dollars. It is probable, however, that some arrangement will be made by which the Natural History Society will come into possession of the relics.

The Sunday following (Nov. 23), while Mr. Maynard and his family were attending public worship, his premises were taken possession of by a horde of invaders from Clinton, Northborough, Marlborough and other adjacent towns, who, with an easy disregard of the Decalogue characteristic of the natives of that region, proceeded to exhume the Mastodon on their own account. Fortunately the owner returned in season to prevent the upheaval of any considerable portion of his meadow, but not before a number of teeth had been found and carried away, which were recovered at the expense of no little time and effort.

At the present writing (Dec. 1884), nine teeth (four of them undeveloped) have been secured, together with numerous pieces of bone belonging to the head, and portions of the tusks. The work of exhumation is at present suspended, but will be resumed.

No description of the Mastodon is intended in this article, as nothing more could be done than to copy what may be found in any encyclopædia. The inquirer is referred to Dr. Warren's elaborate monograph, published in 1852 (second edition, 1855-6),

which describes the Mastodon of North America under the name of *Mastodon giganteus*.* This animal formerly ranged from Canada to Texas, and remains have been found in various parts of the United States. Usually nothing but the teeth (which being protected by enamel outlast the other parts) and traces of the frame are preserved; and perfect specimens are rare. The most complete skeleton in existence, probably, is the one discovered at Newburg, N. Y., in 1845, in a swamp which had, previous to that time, been covered with water. It was purchased by Dr. Warren, and placed in his private museum in Boston, where it still remains. †

* Synonymous with *M. americanus* and *M. ohioiticus*.

† Dr. Warren writes concerning this Mastodon: "A lady from New York (Mrs. Dr. Rhinelander) being at my house at Brookline, a conversation took place on mastodon relics; in which she informed me, that, three weeks previous (namely, in the month of August [1845]), another set of mastodon bones had been discovered, on the North River, at Newburg, N. Y., which were said to be very remarkable. . . . At the time I did not think much of these bones, knowing how much such things are misunderstood and misrepresented; but, a few weeks after, I learnt that the bones had been articulated, and formed a very complete skeleton, consisting of the bones of a single individual. . . . At length, I heard it was exhibited in the city of New York, and presumed it would be there purchased; but found it did not attract much attention in that place. Soon after, it was brought into New England, shown in various towns, and ultimately in Worcester, in this State. There I sent Dr. Lane, who gave me an exact account of the skeleton, and made a bargain for its purchase. It was to be delivered to me on the Saturday evening following. But the proprietors seemed to wish to get rid of the bargain; for, soon after the arrival of the boxes here at the railway, Mr. Brewster informed Dr. Lane that one of the boxes had been broken open, and the thigh-bone stolen. They wished to return directly with the other parts of the skeleton to Worcester. I objected to this movement, and declared my intention to take possession of the bones brought here, and that I should claim a proper deduction for the lost bone. I heard no more that night; and the next morning, which was Sunday, going to Corinthian Hall, where I had directed it to be set up, I found the whole skeleton set up in good order. . . Sir Charles Lyell, when he saw it, intimated that it might be sold in England for seven thousand dollars or more."—*Life of John Collins Warren, M. D., Vol. II., pp. 223-4.*

The following measurements of the Warren Mastodon will give an idea of its proportions: Length of the skeleton, 17 feet; height, 11 feet; length of

The teeth of the Northborough specimen, while their roots have crumbled away, are very perfect in their crowns ; and five of them are of extraordinary beauty, being covered with enamel resembling agate or turquoise. This enamel, which is sometimes worked for jewelry, is known as *odontolithe* or *bone turquoise*. The coloring matter is supposed by some to be oxide of copper, while Dana states it to be phosphate of iron. The remaining four teeth resemble cork in color and luster, and are the undeveloped ones which are formed in the rear, and are pushed forward as those in front wear off and drop out. The accompanying plate, drawn full size by Mr. Fred. E. Pollard, well represents the form and condition of the perfect teeth. This specimen measured $2\frac{5}{8}$ by $4\frac{1}{8}$ inches across the crown, and weighed $19\frac{1}{2}$ ounces.

tusks, 10 feet, 11 inches, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. included in the sockets. The fore-foot measures 2 feet across. Weight of the bones, 2002 pounds. When alive, the creature must have been 12 or 13 feet high, and, including the tusks, 25 feet long.

The published statement, that Dr. Warren paid \$10,000 for this skeleton, is probably incorrect.

